DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 643 CS 211 754

AUTHOR Moffett, James
TITLE Bridges: From Personal Writing to the Formal Essay. Occasional Paper No. 9.
INSTITUTION Center for the Study of Writing, Berkeley, CA.; Center for the Study of Writing, Pittsburgh, PA.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 24p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; Elementary Secondary Education; Essays; Higher Education; *Personal Narratives; *Student Writing Models; *Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Academic Discourse; *Points of View (Writing); Textual Analysis; *Voice (Rhetoric); Writing Assignments

ABSTRACT

How writing teachers get students from the personal-experience theme, with its many colloquial terms, to the formal essay seems to be a national issue. Teachers are under pressure to do the thing that colleges seem to value most--to teach the kind of essay that corresponds to term papers or essay questions. Colleges emphasize this because it is part of their testing program, and this pressure passes all the way down to the elementary school. This tends to determine the bent of the writing curriculum. The purpose is to aim at ways of teaching other kinds of writing that will, at the same time, prepare for what colleges want. There are two main bridges from the personal narrative to various kinds of informal and formal essays. One is by way of intervening kinds of discourse that students might practice in between personal writing and essay writing. The other way is by "parlaying" personal writing directly into essay. A good idea is for writing teachers to use former students' writing to work with current students. A selection of student writing from elementary school through college shows a wide repertoire of writing possibilities. (Includes a figure breaking down the main kinds of writing into five groupings. (RAE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED305643

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. A. Smith

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Center for the Study of Writing

Occasional Paper No. 9

BRIDGES: FROM PERSONAL WRITING TO THE FORMAL ESSAY

James Moffett

March, 1989

University of California, Berkeley
Carnegie Mellon University

CS 211754

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WRITING

Occasional Paper No. 9

BRIDGES: FROM PERSONAL WRITING TO THE FORMAL ESSAY

James Moffett

March, 1989

University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720

Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

The project presented, or reported herein, was performed pursuant to a grant from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement/Department of Education (OERI/ED) for the Center for the Study of Writing. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the OERI/ED and no official endorsement by the OERI/ED should be inferred.

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WRITING

Director	Sarah Warshauer Freedman University of California, Berkeley	
Co-Directors	Linda Flower Carnegie Mellon University	J.R. Hayes Carnegie Mellon University
	James Gray University of California, Berkeley	
Academic Coordinator	Sandra Schecter University of California, Berkeley	
Editor	Melanie Sperling University of California, Berkeley	

Publication Review Board

Chair	Kay Losey Fraser University of California, Berkeley	
Assistant Chairs	Carol Heller University of California, Berkeley	Victoria Stein and Lorraine Higgins Carnegie Mellon University
Advisors	Charles Fillmore University of California, Berkeley	Jill H. Larkin Carnegie Mellon University

Millie Almy, *University of California, Berkeley*
Carla Asher, *Herbert H. Lehman College of the City University of New York*
Nancie Atwell, *Boothbay Region Elementary School, Boothbay Harbor, ME*
Robert de Beaugrande, *University of Florida*
Ruby Bernstein, *Northgate High School, Walnut Creek, CA*
Lois Bird, *Whole Language Consultant*
Wayne Booth, *University of Chicago*
Robert Calfee, *Stanford University*
Michael Cole, *University of California, San Diego*
Colette Daiute, *Harvard University*
John Daly, *University of Texas, Austin*
Peter Elbow, *State University of New York, Stony Brook*
JoAnne T. Eresh, *Writing and Speaking Center, Pittsburgh, PA*
Donald Graves, *University of New Hampshire*
Robert Gundlach, *Northwestern University*
James Hahn, *Fairfield High School, Fairfield , CA*
Julie Jensen, *University of Texas, Austin*
Andrea Lunsford, *Ohio State University*
Marian M. Mohr, *Fairfax County Public Schools, Fairfax County, VA*
Lee Odell, *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute*
Charles Read, *University of Wisconsin*
Victor Rentel, *Ohio State University*
Michael W. Stubbs, *University of London*
Deborah Tannen, *Georgetown University*
Henry Trueba, *University of California, Santa Barbara*
Gordon Wells, *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education*

BRIDGES: FROM PERSONAL WRITING TO THE FORMAL ESSAY*

by

James Moffett

They say that writing was invented about five thousand years ago. That may be so, but it was only discovered about ten years ago in American schools, thanks to the National Writing Project movement. I don't usually feel obliged as a speaker to start with a joke. I've found from experience that I usually commit enough goofs, glitches, and faux pas that it is unnecessary to schedule comic relief. But I did come by a joke, very recently, that I can rationalize. I heard a speaker who was a humorous storyteller, a kind of cracker barrel raconteur. In one of his jokes, he told of a family from the backwoods of Virginia. There was a boy who had grown up to be about ten or eleven and had never said a word. Everyone grew accustomed to this, but one night as they were sitting around the dinner table, the boy suddenly said, "There's too many lumps in the gravy."

They looked over at him absolutely flabbergasted and said, "If you could talk, how come you haven't said anything before?"

He replied, "Everything has been pretty good up till now."

I submit that there's a whole theory of language function secreted within this joke if you bother to extract it.

A speaker has a choice of whether to say something general and inspirational and uplifting, or to say something of some practical value. For better or for worse, I have opted for the latter. My subject is how writing teachers get students from the personal-experience theme, with its many colloquial terms, to the formal essay. This seems to be a national issue. We are under pressure to do the thing that colleges seem to value most--to teach the kind of essay that corresponds to term papers or essay questions. Colleges emphasize this because it is part of

---

*The text that appears here is a modified version of a transcript of a talk from notes that the author gave as part of the Center for the Study of Writing Seminar Series.

their testing program, and this pressure passes all the way down to the elementary school. I believe we are gearing up for this sort of thing far too early. At any rate, this tends to determine the bent of the writing curriculum we have. What I'm going to try to aim at here are ways of doing justice to other kinds of writing that will at the same time prepare for what colleges want.

There are two main ways I think we can bridge from the personal narrative to kinds of informal and formal essays. One is by way of intervening kinds of discourse, kinds of writing, that students might practice in between personal writing and essay writing, kinds of discourse that schools could take much more advantage of. The other way is by parlaying personal writing directly into essay. I'll try to give some examples of that later. I like the term "parlay." It comes from the French "to speak," but in Anglicized use it means to transform something on into something else and that's exactly what we are trying to do here in getting from personal writing to essay writing. We will look for ways of parlaying first-person narrative into essays.

I've been involved a good while in anthologizing student writing. This work has come out in four books called *Active Voices I*, *II*, *III*, and *IV*. These are anthologies of student writing. All they have in them are brief directions and samples of student writings to illustrate the assignments. The reason the project lasted longer than I would have liked is that I had difficulty getting writing in certain categories. That's one of the things I hope to emphasize--we don't ask for a broad variety of writing from our students.

I didn't go for just the top students or top schools, and I didn't run national contests. I worked partly through National Writing Project sites here and there, and partly from other contacts I had from previous curriculum work. I asked some teachers to send student writing to me from a variety of levels and backgrounds. Some of the pieces were very accomplished, and some authors, as you will see, are not so very experienced. All the selections have vitality, and they illustrate the kind of writing that I thought other students would appreciate and want to emulate.

The idea is that you use former students' writing to work with current students. Many teachers are doing this on their own, and I think that's excellent. I would certainly encourage that. You can array for students what the various kinds of writing look like when done by their peers. I also anthologize professional writing, but the problem with professional writing is that it is so intimidating that students sometimes do not identify with those writers. But I believe in using both.

In putting together these anthologies of students' writing I worked across the boards, up and down all the grades, from elementary school into college. I wanted a repertory that would hold good for all the years. I didn't invent tricky assignments or cute stuff to write; I simply looked at what's going on outside of

school. If school is a preparation for life, let's see what's going on out there. What do people outside of school who practice writing really do? These samples represent the main repertory of writing possibilities, more certainly than can be done in a single year. Although I won't go into how to use the repertory (a whole subject in itself), I do want to suggest that it can be used to individualize writing, which I think we should do much more.

Figure 1 is my way of breaking down the main kinds of writing, the writing repertory, into five groupings. At the bottom is a category called *Noting Down*. The reason it's at the bottom is that journals, logs, diaries, and all sorts of

FIGURE 1. Kinds of Writing

THINKING UP
(Imagination)

Fiction
Plays
Poetry

THINKING OVER/THINKING THROUGH
(Cogitation)

Column
Editorial
Review
Personal essay
Thesis essay

LOOKING BACK
(Recollection)

Autobiography
Memoir

LOOKING INTO
(Investigation)

Biography
Chronicle
Case
Profile
Factual article
Feature article

NOTING DOWN
(Notation)

Journal
Diary
Logs

notes are really the base for the kinds of writings above. I think you understand what I mean by the base. You write down things, and later you can write them

up. This is a way of garnering material, jotting things down. Journalists write down everything that might possibly be used later as ideas for writing. At first, they plan to use most of it, but they usually just use some of it. Many professionals take field notes and lab notes. They accumulate materials that they write up into one of the above forms on the schema.

At the next level I have two groupings or very important domains of discourse called *Looking Back* and *Looking Into*. The one on the left is undoubtedly a lot more familiar to teachers, for that's really where you have the personal-experience themes, the first-person narrative. I use the traditional terms "autobiography," which is focused on the author, and "memoir," which is focused on others. So those two represent a shift of focus, and we are already on our way to essay. Memoir is somewhere between personal writing and essay, precisely because of that shift of focus from author to other. The less familiar category, *Looking Into* (Investigation)--which deserves a lot of attention it isn't getting--is reportage and research. It includes traditional third-person types like "biography" and "chronicle" as well as journalistic forms like "cases," "profiles," "factual articles" and "feature articles." Investigation is an important domain in our society, for I believe most people who read are getting their information and ideas through newspapers and magazines and certain kinds of nonfiction books. In fact, many literary writers and novelists, such as Joan Didion and Norman Mailer, sometimes shift back and forth from fiction to nonfiction. Investigation deserves a lot of attention, in part because it has the attention of some of our major writers but also because this writing has gotten very good in our day.

I think people with a literature background are apt to look disdainfully at journalism. We create this little specialty of journalism, and it goes off in a box on the shelf, available only to a few students who elect it. But it ought to be mainstreamed, and I'll try to explain why. Reportage and research represent an important bridge between personal writing and transpersonal writing. (I don't like the term "impersonal." It sounds like nobody's home: there's no face, no voice--just some sort of ghost writing--so I use the term "transpersonal.") I had the most difficulty getting writing in this category, and it is fascinating to think about why schools have neglected the main way to bridge between first-person writing and essay writing.

I think you will agree that investigative writing has been almost universally ignored in the schools. There are many reasons, some of them practical, some having to do with our backgrounds. Even very good teachers, who have a strong background in writing, often don't bother with it. What I found is that most teachers, even very good writing teachers, work with only a few kinds of writing. I am sure they will say they don't have time for more, and it may very well be true. We need to understand why even the best teachers don't require a broader range of writing from their students.

There's a lot to be said about *Looking Into* precisely because we haven't been trained to deal with it, unless you happen to have had some journalism experience. Most teachers probably haven't written in this area, so they don't feel too comfortable with it. Nevertheless, we all have done this kind of reading, *New Yorker* reportage and the excellent kind of reportage that we often get in newspapers and magazines. We feel confident to assess this, so I think we shouldn't feel so wary about assigning student writing in that area.

What do you do when you do investigative writing? You go look, you go ask, or you go look it up--three main things that reporters and researchers do. They go on site, visit, observe, and take notes. Or they interview one or many people, and again they take notes. Or what they can't get from looking and asking they go look up and see what other people have said about this. They go to records, documents, books and so on. This is where the library research comes in. As you notice, what happens here is that you move more and more from first-hand into second-hand information, and that's part of the movement from personal writing to essay writing.

From first person you can draw an arrow, if you wish, going from the left over to the right in Figure 1, from *Looking Back* to *Looking Into*. One of the movements involved is in that direction, going from first person to third person, from writing about self to writing about others, and from first-hand information to second- and third-hand information. I believe this is a very natural movement.

Let's go to the top level. The reason it's above is that *Looking Back* and *Looking Into* form a concrete data base for these other two. The memory is a tremendous storehouse of materials that all professional writers use. It's not narcissistic or solipsistic or just about oneself; it's about all sorts of things. If you think of your own memories, you will recognize that they are about everything, everything you ever had a chance to observe, experience, or participate in. The memory has all sorts of potentialities for the transpersonal writing that goes into essay. The other domain, *Looking Into* (Investigation), includes many sources of materials outside oneself. These are the two main sources on which the top two categories are built.

Thinking Up (Imagination) is most familiar to English teachers, who generally have a literature background. It's what we call "creative writing," but I don't like that term and I never use it. In fact, I never use the word "creative." It sounds sentimental. Creative writing is one of those specialties I wish we didn't have. I wish we would mainstream the writing of fiction into the composition program and not regard it as a specialty like journalism. Few kids will ever take such a specialty, and as a result we remove again one of the main bridges into essay writing.

We generally think of all fiction writing--poetry, plays, short stories--as being very different from the writing of ideas. I regard *all* writing as idea writing.

To me the difference is not whether the writing has ideas but how buried the ideas are, how implicit or explicit the ideas are. In literature and recollection, the ideas are more implicit. They are there, but they are embodied, incarnated in personages, incidents, and events. If this is not true of literature, why do we have students digging for meaning all the time? Why do we have them chasing symbols and doing vivisections of poems and postmortems on novels, digging, digging, digging, all the time for meaning?

Here is a great irony. We have a curriculum in which students *write exposition*; but when they read, they *read literature*. We should have them do *both* types of reading and writing. It's very important for them to have the chance to do some writing in these figurative, fictional modes, because for one thing, these modes are an implicit way of stating ideas. All stories are statements. We can use the term "conclusion" for both fiction and nonfiction. In stories, the conclusions are inherent in the "logic of the events." If that's not true, then we should quit having kids analyzing novels and plays for their meaning.

It is evident that folk literature--fables, parables, legends, and myths--exist mainly to convey ideas, but they convey them in a kind of subconscious or preconscious way. Today we have a heavy industry in analyzing myths. We have whole disciplines mining myths for their meaning--Jungian analysts and anthropologists and literary critics. Legends, fables, parables, and myths all exist as stories that make statements. The fable is right on the hinge between story and statement because the meaning is distilled out as moral at the end. It is interesting to look at folk literature because it tells you a little more clearly about what's going on in modern literature that we are more familiar with.

Let's move into a consideration of the category labeled *Thinking Over/Thinking Through*. I am all for the essay, and I think we should do as much of it as we can. However, I believe that if we move into it developmentally we will get better results. This category includes "Column," "Editorial," and "Review," the journalistic forms of essay. I imagine most people read essays of this sort, and those who are writing them are writing in these journalistic forms. Many of them do exactly what we want students to do in writing--make a generalization and then support it with examples, documentation, and illustrations.

There are many avenues to this, two of which are *Investigation* and *Imagination*. A third way is to go directly from *Recollection* up into *Cogitation*, because memory is a main source of ideas. All we have to do is extrapolate memories, which is what many essayists do. It always amuses me that George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" has been anthologized *ad nauseam* in all the college anthologies under Essay. If a student had written it, it would be called a personal-experience theme. Most of it is narrative, first-person, telling about how he was compelled to shoot an elephant against his will under pressure of the group when he was in civil service in Burma. He knew how to extract and extrapolate the transpersonal aspect of his personal experience so that in the end we think of

it as an essay, although it is a piece of autobiography. But the point is that it is very hard to tell the difference because *memory is one of the main routes to get into the essay.*

What I am suggesting here is that all writing is thinking; it is simply a question of whether the thinking is explicit or implicit. What I suggest is that on the left side of Figure 1, the thinking is implicit and on the right side, it is explicit. Exposition, argumentation, persuasion are on the right-hand side. What we call persuasion and argumentation are not precise terms but general terms for kinds of thesis essay writing. All of the group called *Looking Into* is expository. It bridges into argumentation and persuasion because that is the natural effect of reportage, research, and journalism. After a while an investigator tends not only to gather information but to generalize it, to argue points. The reporter on the beat becomes a columnist in print media, a "commentator" in broadcast journalism. So draw another arrow from Investigation to Cogitation.

The implicit (categories on the left side) roughly corresponds to the functioning of the right hemisphere of the brain, and the explicit (categories on the right side) to the functioning of the left hemisphere. But the trouble with that is that it gets to be a little too neat. First thing you know, we'll be back to that awful division of Bloom's into affective and cognitive, which I think is one of the abominations of educational movements. It's not the case that one hemisphere of the brain is cognitive and the other affective, of having mushy emotion on one hand and dry rationality on the other. Both hemispheres--and both the implicit and explicit--are ways of cognizing. They are both cognitive. It is not that half the head is emotional and the other half rational. It is a disservice to education that we ever accepted that kind of dichotomy.

The only other general thing I would say about the schema in Figure 1 is that the movement, if you go upward here, is generally inductive. That is, it works from particulars to generalities, moving from the concrete particulars of personal experience and narrative ("*once* upon a time") to generality, which is not "once upon a time" but *any* time. We speak of the "present tense of generalization" in grammar, and that is exactly what essay is. So this movement from the concrete particulars to the generalities is an inductive movement in terms of logic. I believe that we have not offered in writing programs enough opportunities to students to work inductively, but that is the way they build their own knowledge structures.

There is a lot of hue and cry today about "thinking"; the buzz word is "critical thinking." If we look seriously at thinking and writing, we soon come to realize that we don't have to add thinking because it is already part and parcel of writing. If we are serious about thinking, we will allow students to work far more inductively than they have in the past, building up from sources of plenty instead of employing a strategy of working from scarcity. I will explain what I mean by that. The deductive approach is to work from the top down, from the higher level

abstractions to the lower. If you are given a topic, or if you choose a topic, or if the essay exam gives you some quotation and you are supposed to refute or support it, and your grade is on the line, then you start at a higher generalization and go downward, looking for something to support or illustrate the generalization. That is what I call a wrong strategy, working from scarcity. What we should work from is plenty, from too much material, so much that you have to waste it, throw some of it away, edit it, winnow it out--in short, compose and select, abstract. Memories and investigations represent materials both inside and outside, wealthy positions, a source of plenty and not a position of scarcity. That sort of wrong-headed strategy comes from working too deductively, starting students at high-level abstract topics, or generalities, and then asking them to go down. It puts us in the position of being professional naggers. We are nagging for details, nagging for evidence, nagging for support, illustrations, and examples, no matter what the kind of writing. This shouldn't happen. It is one of those problems to which we think up brilliant solutions, but it is a stupid problem. It comes from wanting to control the subject matter of student writing and from riding herd on essay before honoring other kinds of writing. If we really want to teach thinking and writing together and get from personal experience to essay, then we should emphasize inductive thinking, which is itself a bridge to deductive thinking.

Now I would like to turn to some selections from student writing. What I want to emphasize here is the parlaying from personal-experience writing directly into the essay, which I think is a very natural movement if we know how to work it. I try to get my students (who are all teachers, by the way, with a lot of experience) to think about what is generic in some of their personal experience. I ask them to choose a personal incident in their life, something interesting, and then to write about it. Then I ask, "Of what is this incident a metaphor?" Maybe nothing will come, but when it does, you are on the road to an essay. Of what is this personal incident a metaphor? Or an emblem or symbol? What does it represent? Of what type is it a token? As soon as you begin writing about types, through the tokens, through the particulars, you are dealing with what essay essentially consists of, which is coordinating an idea with an incident or instance.

Another way is to pluralize personal experiences. I sometimes ask, "Can you think of other incidents, other experiences, to go with this one? Here you would put together a collection, a category of incidents or experiences, which all show the same thing, which all point the same way. They go together, and in that you have your thesis idea. That is the inductive approach. You transpersonalize by including incidents and experiences not just from your personal memories but from what you've heard from other people and what you've read, thus connecting incidents in your own life with incidents in the lives of characters in fiction and drama and of other people you know about. Pluralizing is generalizing.

Now the samples. The first couple are from senior high, grades 10 to 12. The first is an Autobiographical Incident, something very specific that happened in a very small time and space, something that happened one day.

Wonder Woman Strikes Again
Vicki Bilik

It was Monday, the first day of kindergarten after Easter vacation. School had gone well that day. I arrived early that morning with a little baggie full of left-over jellybeans in my lunch. A complete repertoire of stories for my friends, ranging from what the Easter Bunny brought me to the egg hunt in my grandmother's backyard.

The day had gone well. I had convinced all my classmates that I had received the biggest Easter basket of all of them, and I even succeeded in trading a mere two jellybeans for an entire marshmallow bunny. I was shrewd and unfeeling in my business affairs. So, there I was in front of the school, waiting for my mother and contemplating the day's victories. All of a sudden, a sparkle caught my eye. I looked down and there they were, my brand new, black, patent leather shoes, the pride of Miss Bradey's kindergarten class. I had got them to wear on Easter Sunday along with my brand new dress. I was so proud of them.

As I sat there admiring my prized possessions, I felt a shadow fall upon me. I looked up, and there was Jeffrey Wilson. He thought he was so cool just because he was in first grade and I was only in kindergarten. For absolutely no reason at all he looked down and sneered.

"Those are the ugliest shoes I've ever seen!" Then if that insult to my precious shoes wasn't enough, he leaned over and *spit* on them.

I felt the tears rush to my eyes, but I held them back. I wasn't going to let that beast know how deeply he had hurt me.

Suddenly I became aware of something heavy in my right hand. Of course! My Wonder Woman lunch box! Wonder Woman wouldn't let me down. I reached my right arm back and then swung forward, Wonder Woman hitting Jeffrey in the face with all her might.

"That'll show that creep!" I thought.

Just as I watched Jeffrey go crying into the boys' bathroom, my mother pulled up in the station wagon. I got in the car and relaxed against the seat. Defending one's honor is very hard work, you know.[1]

Of course, you can see this is a very aware girl. She knows exactly what she is doing. The story includes a very brave picture of a not so admirable side of herself, at least back when she was in kindergarten. You can see she doesn't make many explicit statements; this is pure story. And yet it is full of so many ideas, so many potentialities, so many generalizations you could make if you

wanted to. You could add other incidents that would lead to more general notions about boys and girls of that age, or their relationships, or relationships between the sexes generally, or about smugness and complacency, or about unwittingly tempting other people. You see so many potential themes.

It's always interesting to me that we use the term "theme" for any type of student writing. "Theme" means a kind of thesis or a generalization. I think essay consists mainly of bringing out some of these latent ideas.

The next piece is from a high school boy who lives in rural Oregon, east of the Cascade Mountains. It is a Memoir of Nature, as I call the assignment.

Cougars at Bay
Scott Stephens

About three years ago I witnessed something very few city folks get to see.

I was archery hunting in a remote canyon, known to most people as Fiddlers Hell. This was not irregular at all since Doug Anderson and I hunted there quite often. It's a steep canyon that most people won't dare to venture into.

I didn't quite know what I was doing there. I saw many deer and elk and didn't even bother to shoot.

About noon I stopped to rest on a large rock. I was sitting there enjoying the scenery, when I spotted a slight movement in the brush. I was hoping to see a big bull elk.

To my surprise two full grown cougars strolled out into the meadow. They were playing happily, wrestling with each other.

The wind was blowing in my face and I was sitting above them. As long as I was still I could watch them play.

They played in the meadow for about an hour, and then as if a signal from nature beckoned to them, they raced off. I wasn't quite sure what made them run off. I attempted to follow them.

As I stepped off my rock, I caught a faint sound of braying dogs. Then I knew. Poachers! I thought for sure the cats would be shot.

I ran up on the ridge, leaving my bow lying on the ground. I spotted the dogs. I was shocked. These were no pure-bred hunting dogs used by poachers. Instead, they were a mangy crew of about seven dogs, led by a

big redbone. It was the wild pack that I had heard so much about. I spotted the cougars just ahead of the pack. One cougar climbed a tree, the other prepared to fight. With a rock cliff at its back and the pack at its front, it fought.

I ran back to get my bow. When I reached the fight one cougar and five dogs lay dead. The other two dogs ran off. I went up to the cougar. It was a large male. The female was still in the tree.

I never understood why the male didn't tree, or why the female didn't help.

About three months later I figured it out. In the first place if he had climbed the tree the dogs would have waited for them to starve. And the male fought the dogs to give the female a chance for her life; she was bearing young. I've often gone back to Fiddlers Hell to look for the cougars, but I've never found them.[2]

One of the things interesting to me about this piece is that the writer is always trying to figure out things. He is thinking about what he observes. The story is straightforwardly told by a boy who tuned into nature and was a good observer. He probably hunts just as an excuse to get out there in nature and observe it. He really didn't do any hunting here, but he's thinking about what he observes. I believe this is the main thing that makes an essay successful.

As you can see, this writing is not really focused on the author himself. It's told in the first person, but it's focused on what he's looking at. So it is on its way to exposition because it tells you about what goes on in the world; it's information and reflection.

The next piece is from an eighth-grader. It is a poll from that domain call *Investigation*. Essentially you think of some question you want answered and then go out and find the answer. Kids think of something they want to know more about, and the teacher helps them find out how to know more about it. The author wanted to know more about what people think about nuclear energy. This piece is from Spanish Harlem, New York City, where we've collected a lot of writing from junior high.

A Poll on Nuclear Energy
Gemma DiGrazia

This poll was conducted mainly among middle-class New Yorkers. Almost all of the adults had a college education. The majority of them live on the Upper West Side. There was an equal amount of females and males. Most people who answered were over forty or under twenty.

The questions asked were:

1. Do you think nuclear energy is necessary as an alternative energy source? If no: What are the alternatives?
   36% thought nuclear energy was necessary. All of them mentioned that other energy sources would run out.
   64% said it wasn't necessary. Energy alternatives they listed were: coal, solar, waterpower, and conservation of existing energy.

2. Describe what you think the effects of radioactivity on humans are.
   All people mentioned some physical symptoms as effects of radiation and radioactivity. These are:

symptoms	*% of people who mentioned each symptom*
death	60%
genetic damage	58%
radiation sickness	56%
general sickness	52%
cancer	36%
sterility	12%

3. Do you think the public is fully informed about nuclear hazards and safety?
   All said no, the public wasn't fully informed.
   25% said no because they think most people aren't educated enough to understand the problems of nuclear energy.
   50% said no, because they think information is deliberately withheld in lies and coverups by the government and nuclear energy people.
   5% said they think nuclear energy is too technical and complex for almost everybody to understand.
   20% said the public is not told everything because there is no reason to panic them when they can't do anything about it.

4. Would you know what to do in case of a nuclear disaster (i.e., meltdown) in your area?
   55% said no.
   45% said yes. Those who don't feel nuclear energy is dangerous had faith in the authorities to tell them how to avoid harm. Everyone else was afraid of dying and said they would run or hide, listen to T.V./radio but not believe everything they heard, or hold their loved ones and pets.

5. Do you think that children should be educated to the benefits and dangers of nuclear energy? Why or why not?

2% said no, people at that age shouldn't be burdened with such things.
98% said yes, they are our future. Future decisions depend on them. Yes, so they are more fully informed about the world we live in. Some people wrote yes, though wait until they're old enough.

6. Do you think you can do anything to educate others about nuclear energy?
18% said no, they were not educated enough themselves to teach about it.
12% said yes, educate people to its benefits.
60% said yes, they would tell people the facts and were sure that these would convince them of their dangers.

7. Are you in favor of using nuclear energy?
12% said yes only if for medical purposes or if safety is drastically improved.
48% said yes, either now or in the future. Most of these people thought it was necessary to have nuclear energy and it was just a matter of making it safer.
40% said no, because of obvious dangers and lack of possible safety ever.

8. Do you think we can have safe nuclear energy?
42% said no because of either total unsafeness of any nuclear energy or because those in control will push it on us before it can be made safe.
30% said maybe. They said this because of lack of information or belief that it *can* be safe, but it might be safe long after it is in use.
28% said yes. These people believe either that nuclear energy is safe now or will be very soon.

The people who were for nuclear energy contradicted themselves a bit on the question that asked if you think the public is fully informed on nuclear energy. All of them thought that not all the information about nuclear energy was available to the public, yet they all thought that they had enough information to feel safe and in favor.

The people who were unsure felt they didn't know enough.

The people against nuclear energy also felt that information was kept from them. One of the issues everyone agreed upon was the issue of the public's awareness of the information about nuclear energy. They all seem to think we need to know more.

Everyone thought that a nuclear energy accident would be harmful to people, and yet some people felt nuclear energy was safe or will be soon. And these people were in favor of using nuclear energy as an energy source.

Before I took the poll I had some ideas of what kinds of answers would be given back to me. I had hoped that most of the people would have been against nuclear energy, but the majority of the people were for nuclear energy. Another thing that surprised me was the amount of people who were uninformed or unsure. I had hoped that people would be surer on an issue like this.

From this poll I have learned a lot. I have learned how people have such different opinions from each other and how rigid some people are. The most surprising thing is that people have such opposite opinions while using the same information to get their opinions.[3]

That's not a bad conclusion. The writer arrived at it inductively from her own information. She did the leg work to find out what people thought about something. She thought about what they said; she related responses to the questions and drew her own conclusions.

Next is a piece from elementary school. I use these domains for all grades, but it is obvious that in the lower grades you are not going to get as much of some kinds of writing. For example, you wouldn't expect a lot of thesis writing in the elementary school. I think it should be available for those who can, and in this way individualization can occur. Kids can do extraordinary things in elementary school, but you shouldn't insist that they all do the same thing at the same time. Those who can should go ahead and do it. Some groups will be writing at one level, some at other levels. There are many possibilities for expository and persuasive writing, and the essay included here, a review, goes into only some of those possibilities.

Cat Calls
Nina Billone

Suddenly the whole stage turned red, and colored lights flashed on and off. Two cats cautiously crawled out of a pipe. The trunk to a broken-down car opened with a creak, while more cats filled the stage.

My mother and I had seats in the mezzanine, which is just above the first floor of the Schubert Theater in Chicago. I was extremely excited because I was watching *Cats*.

The stage was decorated like a junkyard. There were four Rice Krispies cereal boxes about two feet high, a tennis racket, and a garbage can, but best of all there was a tire that was about four feet around.

After minutes of dancing, the cats all went back to their hiding places except one. He started singing, "I have a Gumby Cat in mind. Her name is Jenny Anny Dots. Her coat is of the tabby kind with tiger stripes and leopard spots. . . ." As he sang, the trunk to the car opened. Inside was a cat with tiger stripes and leopard spots acting out every move that the cat sang about Jenny Anny Dots.

Many songs went by such as "Growl Tiger, Gus" (the theater cat), "Mongojerrie" and "Rumpleteazer," etc.

Then a very interesting song came on, "The Rum Tum Tugger," which started out, "The Rum Tum Tugger is a curious cat. . . ." The Rum Tum Tugger was a teenage cat whose coat was black and stuck to his body. I decided he was my favorite cat. He acted a lot like our cat Benjy. The play ended.

On the way home I sat in the back seat of the car with my mind full of scenes from the wonderful play I had just seen.

I like cats a lot, and seeing *Cats* made me realize that other people understand cats the way I do and know that they are like people.[4]

Of course some of those "other people" include T. S. Eliot. She's in good company. This girl doesn't do everything that can be done in a review but she comes to some generalizations in the end, and elementary kids should have some opportunities for writing real reviews. The form will grow as they grow.

Finally a couple of samples of what we call personal essay, which is not a very specific category, but much of our best literary writing falls into this category, from the eighteenth century on through to modern authors.

This piece is from junior high school.

Funny Feelings
Jennifer Levi

Lately, walking down the street has not been the most pleasant thing for me to do. I feel very self-conscious because men are always looking and saying things to me. I don't think I do or say or wear anything to get myself noticed. I think it is disgusting that men feel that they have the right to say things to women they don't even know. I don't think they

know how it makes women feel; I don't even think they care. All they care about is themselves and having their fun.

It makes me angry, but at the same time it makes me scared. It makes me angry that they can make me feel like I can not walk around without being watched. It makes me scared because at any given moment they might hurt me.

I remember when I was just starting to develop and I was very embarrassed about it. There was only one other girl in my class that had started to develop too. I remember hearing some boys in my class talking about their bodies--they were *so* proud about their bodies, but I never really talked to any of my friends about it then. Now we sometimes talk about it, but not a lot. It seems like boys always talk about their bodies. Sometimes I even get embarrassed listening to them talking about their own bodies.

I felt real weird because in one way I was being told to be showy about my body from movies and TV. At the same time I was being told to be quiet about my body from my own fear of what other people would think. For a while I was very confused until I finally decided to go with my own feelings. Now I do not show it and I do not hide it. I just wear what I want and I do what I want to do. I don't let my fear or what I see interfere with what I do or wear.

I think that as you grow up you become less ashamed and more proud of your body (male or female). I know that men, well at least the men on the street, are very proud and showy of their bodies. Some women, the ones on TV and in movies, are showy, and some women just don't do anything either way, like me.

I know that I can not make the men on the street stop looking and saying weird things to me; all I *can* do is not make them or anyone else feel the way they've made me feel.[5]

This could have been put in fictional form or in a poem. In fact I found that a lot of what I really felt were essays were done as poems in junior high. I included some of them under the category of essay because that's what they were, and then it occurred to me that poetry may be a natural way for junior high kids to express some of their emerging generalizations.

I'm going to end with a personal essay written by one of my students at the Breadloaf School of English in Vermont, herself an experienced teacher. What she does here is to pluralize personal experiences, tell two incidents that show the same thing. She does here exactly what Orwell does in an essay which is virtually unknown. I anthologized it in a book called *Points of Departure*, which

is a collection of nonfiction arranged in the same way student writing is arranged here.[6]

As you know, Orwell was a reporter or journalist. In World War II, he went in to Europe right behind the liberation forces, with other journalists. From that experience he did a piece called "Revenge is Sour," based of course on one of our platitudes, revenge is sweet. So his thesis is his title. He tells two incidents which he witnessed that document his point. The first incident occurred somewhere in France when he was with another journalist. The American troops had rounded up some SS officers who were a miserable-looking lot. There was one in particular who had clubfeet and looked psychotic. A Jewish American officer came up and began kicking the SS officer. The American officer said he felt that this was his moment when revenge would be sweet. But Orwell says that when that moment comes it isn't sweet; you think the victory is going to be sweet when you are helpless and hapless and out of power, when you are the victim. When you're back in power, you get revenge, but it really isn't sweet. That's what Orwell is saying. Then he related that to punishment in Germany after World War II, to events such as the Nuremberg trials. He told of a second incident in which he and a Belgian journalist were entering Stuttgart just after the forces had gone in. The Belgian journalist was prepared to hate the Germans when he saw them--"the Boches," he called them, using the old World War I term. When he saw a dead German soldier on the way in, he noticed that somebody had strewn a spray of lilacs over the body, perhaps as a kind of funeral gesture. It was the first dead person the other reporter had even seen. By the time he had actually seen German prisoners, he wasn't able to savor their downfall as he thought he would. He gave them coffee instead.

This construction is very similar to what we will read next. The writer was not emulating the Orwell essay at all. Our class hadn't read it; she just came up with it spontaneously. She put together two incidents which she felt showed the same thing.

A Work of Art
Shirley Rau

I recently served on a panel on a three-day writing conference in Boise, Idaho. Eight teachers of English from grade school through college were arranged in a small semi-circle on a stage, responding to questions from conference participants. Toward the end of the afternoon, everyone was getting tired. We were all thinking about the half hour that remained between us and release from the cramped auditorium. Valorie leaned toward the small hand-held mike with a three by five card, the last question from her discussion group: "What is a teacher's responsibility when a student turns in writing that is confessional or that reflects a troubled perspective?" Her voice reverberated as I met the blank eyes of those opposite from me. Pat took the mike:

"The best thing to do is treat the piece as a work of art and comment on it as such. We are not trained to deal with counseling matters." Her businesslike finality signaled another panel member to go on to the next question. The rest of the section was a blur. My mind kept turning over and over "treat the piece as a work of art." That clinical, rubber-glove theory of dealing with writing was echoed by members of my own department. Literary majors all, they analyzed narrative perspective, imagery, character, plot, genre and theme. They analyzed everything in literature except its connection to reality.

Last year every student in my class kept a literary response journal. Charlotte Britton's journal was filled with poetry, which reflected her fragility and sensitivity. Each week writing groups met to share sections of the journals for comments. The poem that Charlotte shared in February was stark, devoid of the romantic softness so typical in her writing. And though I heard the poem that day and have read it many times since, I can only remember torn snatches:

a dove
the clang of a metal door
a gun
the question to one who remains

I don't remember exactly how the writing group responded; perhaps we didn't, perhaps the words of her poem turned over and over in our minds until the businesslike finality of some response signaled another reader to go on to the next piece. One week after writing the poem, Charlotte went into the bathroom between classes and shot herself in the chest. She lived through the suicide attempt but I've died it a thousand times.[7]

What the author has done here is put together two instances of teachers distancing themselves from student emotion, and she has put them together, exactly as Orwell did, to illustrate a thesis, which she too states in her title, "A Work of Art," though more obliquely than Orwell.

My own assignment today was to talk about how students might gradually write their way from personal narrative to transpersonal essay. I have not tried to deal with the composing process or with classroom management for writing, important as these are. I took on the assignment about bridging because I think that forcing exposition and argumentation defeats itself and forces out those other kinds of writing that not only lead naturally into essay but that should be fully honored for their own sake. Such development will not only teach thesis writing best but will open up the school writing repertory in sorely needed ways. Formal essay should not be the goal of the writing curriculum, only the outgrowth of it.

Notes

1. Moffett, J. (1987). *Active Voices III*, p. 36. Upper Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books and Boynton/Cook.

2. Moffett, J. (1987). *Active Voices III*, pp. 75-76. Upper Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Education Books and Boynton/Cook.

3. Moffett, J. (1987). *Active Voices II*, pp. 110-112. Upper Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books and Boynton/Cook.

4. Moffett, J. (1987). *Active Voices I*, pp. 257-258. Upper Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books and Boynton/Cook.

5. Moffett, J. (1987). *Active Voices II*, p. 310. Upper Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books and Boynton/ Cook.

6. Moffett, J. (1985). *Points of Departure: An Anthology of Nonfiction*, pp. 380-84. New York: New American Library.

7. Moffett, J. (1987). *Active Voices IV*, pp. 303-304. Upper Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books and Boynton/Cook.

NATIONAL ADVISORY PANEL
The Center for the Study of Writing

Chair
Fred Hechinger
The New York Times Foundation

Alonzo Crim
Professor of Urban Educational Leadership
Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

Sister Regina Noel Dunn
Teacher
Villa Maria Academy, Malvern, PA

Marcia Farr
Associate Professor of English
University of Illinois, Chicago, IL

Abraham Glassman
Chairman
Connecticut State Board of Education

Bill Honig
California Superintendent
of Public Instruction

The Honorable Gary K. Hart
California State Senator

Sibyl Jacobson
Executive Director
Metropolitan Life Foundation

John Maxwell
Exeutive Director
National Council of Teachers of English

Roy Peña
Principal
Andrews High School, El Paso, TX

Carol Tateishi
Teacher
Ross Elementary School, Kentfield, CA

Richard C. Wallace, Jr.
Pittsburgh Superintendent of Schools
and Secretary, Board of Education